TIME AND SPACE IN THE COMPOSITION OF *IL LIBRO DEL CORTEGIANO*

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The co-ordinates of space and time are important inroads to the study of any literary text, as the fundamental studies by Georges Poulet and Jurij Lotman, respectively, suggest. For the Renaissance Italian classic by Baldessar Castiglione, space and time are especially crucial. If we examine the finished product, that is, the text of *Il libro del cortegiano* as it was published in Venice in 1528, we learn immediately in the prefatory letter that the author's alleged aim was that of painting a portrait of an idealized space ("un ritratto di pittura della corte d'Urbino") (6). It is also an ideal time from the past when (and I stress the word **when**) Urbino was headed by the Montefeltros.

Opening with the word "Quando" (3), a temporal conjunction, the text, in fact, is marked by temporality. The geographical and interior settings are carefully defined in the opening chapters, in part following the rhetorical schemes pertaining to the praise of cities, as recommended by Quintilian (III, vii, 26-28), for example, who singles out for attention the origins, location, great individuals and their achievements, and the public works of cities, but also according to more generally traditional criteria of circularity and symmetry, that have been analysed by scholars like Wayne A. Rebhorn. The spatial trajectory traced by the narrative — in almost mystical fashion — outward (in the description of the Urbino landscape), inward (inside the palace itself), and upward (in the heaven-bound speech on love in book IV), but then

finally outward again at the end of the treatise, has more than a mere literal meaning. Its symbolic connotations add depth to the text. A close examination of the text shows that the closed circle of perfection created at the beginning in the description of the seating arrangement of the interlocutors opens up at the end; the characters engaged up to that point on exclusively vespertine and mainly conversational pastimes look out the windows to the horizon at daybreak. This shift occurs just after the discussion on Neoplatonic love, when the character Pietro Bembo's ecstatic surge vertically upwards on the ladder of love, which is challenged from the start by the sceptics present at the conversations, ends abruptly with a fall back to earth. Horizontality ultimately replaces verticality, undermining thus a perfect structure and an ideology of certainty.

Historically the scene depicted in the treatise can be dated 1507, on the basis of the allusion early in the text (I, 6) to the pope's passing through Urbino. But the greater part of the temporal dimension of *Il libro del cortegiano* is of a more psychological nature; witness the prefatory letter, which constitutes an important section of what we might wish to call the frame. Here on the margins of the text, the theme of memory and the sentiment of nostalgia are pervasive, as many readers like Vittorio Cian, Rebhorn, and Claudio Mutini have noted. The melancholy mood created cannot but influence our perspective on and reading of the text. The author expresses sadness over the demise of his worthy characters — a rueful reminiscence that recurs in the introduction to book IV. Time-consciousness finds expression at the beginning of book III also, where Castiglione reiterates his intention of immortalizing his companions and his experience at Urbino through his writing. Some years ago, in an essay, I traced the time-related elements in *Il libro del cortegiano*, some more obvious and others less explicit, including the references to aging in the introduction to book II. Time-awareness underlies Castiglione's theory of language, for example, since his strong advocacy of the fundamental principle of modern usage is based on the realization that languages, like everything

else, inevitably change and eventually die, victims of "quella mutazione che si fa in tutte le cose umane" (I, 32:72). In the dispute on letters and arms late in book I (chs. 43, 45) the speaker Bembo highlights the immortalizing function of literature, which succeeds in conquering time and death. At the end of the prefatory letter the author himself enlists time, said to be the father of truth, as the final judge of whether his own now "writerly" book, as John Bernard recently termed it (36), is to be read and live, or be forgotten and die. The cycle of the seasons, used to describe the evolution of language (I, 36), is suggested even more subtly as the reader is led through a series of mental landscapes. We move from the spring- or summer-like countryside surrounding Urbino to an autumnal setting at the beginning of book II, when the narrator observes that the flowers of contentment fall in old age like leaves from a tree, and back again to possible renewal in the conclusion, where the sunrise is described, along with the gentle breeze and sweet song of birds that adorn it. The courtier himself is subject to aging in the treatise as his education is discussed in the early parts, his role as a mature man in politics, and his experience of Neoplatonic love, as an older man in the last book. The world of flux and the four ages of man, alluded to explicitly in II 15, may be reflected even in the external structure of the treatise, which is in four parts, the author having discarded the triadic form adopted, it would seem, in an earlier version.

So much for individual segments of the text. Overall a sense of timing, recommended as one of the characteristics of decorum forming part of the art of *cortegiania*, is a central message conveyed in the treatise. Adapting to different times and — in spatial terms — to different circumstances, is the essence of discretion and prudence — a general notion that is repeated throughout the work. Recently Antonio Gagliardi (25) has interpreted the treatise as a book about adapting to changing times — a handbook for survival, as Woodhouse (3) had argued earlier, but more particularly, one tied to the fact that man is subject to constant flux.

Time is undoubtedly important in *Il libro del cortegiano*, not only in connection with the thematic content of the work, as I've suggested so far, but also as a result of the overlaying of temporal strata in the narrative frame with respect to the dialogic inner parts that it envelops. This is a structural feature of many multilayered texts, dialogic and non, featuring embedded sections which serve to establish a clear contrast between then and now. In the case of Castiglione's treatise this feature is highlighted spatially with the use of deictic terms, namely contrasting demonstratives: in the first sentence of the prefatory letter, he explains that he has been inspired ("stimulato") by "*quella* memoria" to write "*questi* libri del *Cortegiano*" (3). Other similar instances of the recurring intrusion of the author/narrator's voice in the frame remind us at intervals of the shifts in time.

There are further aspects to the spatial and temporal dimensions of *Il libro del cortegiano* too and these are the ones that I wish to focus on here, namely, the layering that occurs in the composition of this classic text. Its evolution over time through three principal redactions is well documented in five extant manuscripts and was first analysed in depth in the 1960s by Ghino Ghinassi. We must remember that the author himself draws attention to his revisions when he describes the difficult struggle he was waging against time in order to prepare the work for its hastened publication. The regret he voices, at not having sufficient time to complete his masterpiece as he would have wished, is indicative of his labour.

Il libro del cortegiano was written, revised and augmented over a period of at least fifteen years, during which time many changes occurred in the author's life, in the situation on the Italian peninsula, and in the wider context of the European arena. The story of his life and the history of events in the early sixteenth century are well known and their impact on the text have been traced by Piero Floriani, for one. Castiglione transferred from Mantua and Urbino to Rome, from the Italian peninsula to Spain, from a secular to an ecclesiastical post as papal nuncio, coping along the way with the loss of family and friends.

As power shifted among the European states, so did his stated allegiances, making him an opportunistic careerist, at least in the view of Walter Barberis (xxix,lix). But we might view Castiglione more favourably as a realist — one at times as pragmatic as Machiavelli himself. There is no doubt that movement in space and the passage of time affected the author's outlook on a number of issues. The revisions he brought to the text are a good indication of the evolution in his outlook.

As part of a research project that was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, I have studied the early drafts, and especially, for the purposes of this paper at least, the manuscript fragments in the Mantuan manuscript still in the private archive of the Castiglione family, along with some of the more complete manuscripts of the first redaction housed in the Vatican (above all MSS 8204 and 8205 and, to a lesser degree 8206, which was published by Ghinassi as the *Seconda redazione)*, as well as the Laurenziana manuscript in Florence (Ashburnham MS. 409) used by the first printer. My collation of these has produced interesting results which I have presented on various occasions and at different venues in Europe and North America, beginning with the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh in 1996. It has revealed significant variants, many of which had not been noted, at least not until Amedeo Quondam published a large volume, which reached me just a few weeks before the Cape Town conference.

A comparison of the redactions has revealed how, over the period during which he worked on his text, Castiglione did much more than concern himself with the current trend toward standardization of the Italian vernacular. As the variants show, he actually resisted the suggestions of his copyists with considerable obstinacy and, in any case, ultimately left the linguistic revision of his text to someone else. Nor was he solely preoccupied with fleshing out his dialogue and improving its structure — a development in his manuscripts that I've dealt with elsewhere in papers that are forthcoming in Europe and

North America. He also made substantial revisions that reflect his changing perspective: he toned down the masculist voice that is heard in certain early formulations of the discussions and deleted what could be construed as offensive or potentially dangerous passages, generally moving closer to a stand that we might define as one of 'political correctness'. Samples of the changes that he made may be grouped for the sake of convenience under three main headings: humour, politics and women — just three of the wide spectrum of topics that are covered in this veritable compendium of Renaissance culture.

A substantial portion of the fragments and earliest drafts in question is, in fact, devoted to the subject of humour. At this point in the development of the text we find that Castiglione adopts the basic Ciceronean classification of jests. But typically there is as yet no evidence of the more philosophical considerations that lend depth to book II of the definitive text, where Castiglione later points to the therapeutic benefits of laughter and the social value of witticisms, for example (II, 45). Significant variation is found in the narration too. It includes the witticism, attributed to Bembo, about the man discovered in bed with a nun and said to be, therefore, not caught redhanded in a compromising situation, as we might assume, but simply lazy ("pegro" [Mantua MS 25r]), probably, as we must conjecture, because he didn't get up early enough from bed not to be caught. Since this joke, as I've found, regularly fails to elicit laughter from audiences, it may simply not have been witty enough for the author to wish to preserve it. In fact the different formulations and eventual deletion in the very last of the manuscripts (Laurenziana Ashburnham MS 409, 127v-128r) indicates Castiglione's reservations — or possibly Bembo's objections at being associated with such a witticism. On the other hand, another rejected joke may have been deemed too coarse. It deals with the lack of courage shown by the military, and especially by one constipated and fearful soldier, whose physical problem was relieved when he was shown a weapon. Before Castiglione deleted it, it read as follows in a mixture of Italian and Spanish: "Disse Sallazar de la Pedrada, de un

soldato stiticho, 'mostralde un arma y luego cagarà'" (Mantua MS 26v-27r). A longer story, also scatological in nature, hinging on the literal and figurative meanings of *fezze* (turds, trifles) was expunged at an early stage (Mantua MS 36r-v).

Other narratives that, in spite of their excesses, survived Castiglione's self-censorship, did at times undergo revisions that, albeit seemingly slight, are actually quite radical. This is true of the changes that Castiglione introduced in a story illustrating the category of the *burla* or practical joke. It concerns the peasant from Bergamo who speaks the rough dialect of the region, and is welcomed at the court of Urbino, where the ladies are led by their male counterparts into believing that he is a Spanish gentleman and an able linguist who can imitate regional speech, especially "lombardo contadino" (II, 85:237). In the printed text we are told how the elegant attire of this cowherd (originally a shepherd) served to deceive the ladies, but there is no description of his physical attributes. In the Mantua manuscript instead, in a passage which the author crossed out, the peasant is described in some detail: he had a good physique but was dark and dirty, that is, in the original Italian, "de assai bona persona, negro in vista e con capelli boni e negri" (Mantua MS, 8r-v). Because of his uncleanliness "secretamente, fu prima fatto entrare in un bagno, e ben lavato, e netto di quel sucidume, contadinescho..." "e tutto poi profumato quanto si po". These details about bathing and perfuming him vanished by the time Castiglione published his treatise. How are we to interpret the revisions? It is unlikely that Castiglione's doubts about the appropriateness of these passages stemmed from any kind feelings the aristocrat might have had toward peasants, but he may very well have been inspired to eliminate the gross particulars by a sense of common courtesy toward the nobility among his characters and future readers.

Other omissions that occur during the progress of the composition of *Il cortegiano* may be due instead to a concern for true political correctness. Castiglione, who sought some sort of security as he

moved from court to court — from Mantua to Rome to Spain —, must have reworked his text according to his personal situation and the evolving political landscape. In the early manuscripts we find remarks about political matters, both foreign and Italian, that were later expunged. When, in view of the growing power of the emperor Charles V, his political allegiance became more clearly defined, he prudently suppressed a statement regarding his preference for the French over the Spaniards as well as his criticism of the uncultured Spaniards who had chased the French out of Italy (Vatican MS 8204, 65r). In book I, chapters 42-43 of the definitive edition the French are still mildly chastised for not appreciating letters sufficiently. The Spaniards instead are spared any jibes whatsoever. Their monarch Isabella, for example, is awarded glowing praise — in fact this whole section is added in the second redaction (385-387) — and the Spanish court remains the setting for many witty anecdotes.

Castiglione became more cautious in dealing with Italian politics too. The tale about two Florentines who engage in witty repartee during a sitting of their government contains an uncomplimentary adjective describing republics as factious. But in the vulgate version (II, 77) the derogatory modifier, "faciose" (Mantua MS, 26r), is dropped completely and reference is made to republics *tout court*. Another minor revision, is similarly telling: the emotional passage decrying the plight of poor Italy left prey to the barbarians partly because of "el mal governo *de li principi*" (Mantua, MS 97r-v) becomes simply "il mal governo" (IV, 33:403), as Floriani had noticed (1972: 47n) and no blame is placed on princes specifically. Castiglione continues to denounce corrupt princes in generic terms in the definitive edition, but eventually he appears almost to place some blame on the courtiers themselves who have ceased to offer good counsel.

Perhaps in the changing political climate of the courts, there were fewer real opportunities for a courtier to offer advice. Consequently over time as he revised *Il cortegiano*, Castiglione diminished the political role of the courtier somewhat. Originally entrusting the

courtier with boldly carrying out the task of advising the prince, he then made him humbler in his dealings with his master. This is subtly illustrated in the passage regarding the dilemma faced by counsellors who are tempted not to obey their master's ill-advised orders. The courtier who in the early drafts **knows** that he knows better than the prince, is replaced by the courtier who less presumptuously and more cautiously **thinks** that he knows better (II, 24: 154). This is a tiny revision, *parendomi* being substituted for *conoscendo* (Vatican MS 8205, 98r), but it is indicative of a change in the author's attitude.

More and more cognizant of the importance of rank, status and power, Castiglione systematically changed the title for the character Gasparo Pallavicino from *messer* to the more noble *signor* in the second Vatican manuscript (8205). Emilia too, originally called *madonna* acquires the title *signora* throughout the final Laurenziana manuscript. It should be noted that later in the sixteenth century Giovanni Della Casa, in his *Galateo*, was to note the distinction between these forms of address and recommend adherence to the correct titles. Castiglione also removed offensive comments he had made earlier about specific individuals at court — especially important figures, of course, no doubt heeding his own warning about not targetting the powerful in joke-telling (II, 83), as Quintilian had recommended (VI, iii). When, after the discussion of the multiple talents required of the courtier, it is said that it would be impossible to find such a receptacle, one speaker remarks that Grasso de' Medici, a heavy man in the service of the Medici, would have the same advantage over the slender Pietro Bembo that a *botte* has with respect to a *barile* (Vatican MS 8205, 59v). The analogy with jugs and barrels, which could not be flattering to Bembo, is omitted in all later versions including the printed text (I, 46). Similarly the exaggerated tale about someone being so thin as to have been swept up the chimney originally had as its protagonist Giuliano de' Medici (Vatican MS 8205, 142r) but, for this rather undignified mishap, his illustrious name was subsequently replaced with that of his servant Golpino (II, 70). Criticism of the corrupt Borgia Pope

Alexander VI too is attenuated somewhat when the author removes the statements made in the early drafts that the inscription of his name over the door, indicating that Borgia had forced his way into the papal post, had indeed proven truthful, and that the author and his companions at court, who had been witnesses to this truth, knew it very well (Vatican MS 8205, 124r-v). For the definitive edition (II, 48) Castiglione did not sacrifice the witticism totally, but he did distance himself somewhat from the criticism of the pope.

As a court writer Castiglione was more outspoken at first, but he became more prudent as time passed. Perhaps the greatest example of his indiscretion early on is found in his description of Duke Federico da Montefeltro. Extolling his fame as "immortale" (Vatican MS 8204, 13r) — an adjective that he eventually deleted along with other instances of excessive praise, however — he described the duke's physical appearance and, following the example of a humanist biographer, made mention of his distinguishing trait, the absence of one eye — a feature that has made Federico's classically styled profile portraits by Piero della Francesca so meaningful, of course, since they conveniently hide the defect. No mention of this maiming is to be found in the definitive edition. It is true that the Montefeltro family was no longer important and so Castiglione eventually reduced in length the section he had originally devoted to them, but the omission of the detail would appear to be tied to other criteria of caution and correctness too.

Some alterations were made in the portrayal of the Duchess herself. Readers familiar with the lavish compliments that Castiglione pays her in the vulgate text, may take it for granted that the Duchess was treated with deference from the very beginning. This is not the case, however. In the earlier versions, the men at court display a condescending attitude towards her. And whereas in the introductory part of the definitive text the procedure whereby topics for discussion are suggested is altogether orderly, there is much unruly behaviour in the earlier versions. The poet Unico Aretino, who eventually is **invited** to speak, here actually **interrupts** abruptly and interjects his denunciation

of the guiles of the duchess who does not return his love. Although prominent at the time for his success as an improviser, he was also known to be a haughty individual and an aggressive suitor. In fact, whereas in the vulgate edition he simply calls the Duchess an ingrate but continues to address her properly as "Signora", in the earlier version he expresses the wish to reveal the wiles of a saucy young woman ("l'inganni d'una giotta fegatella" [Vatican MS 8204, 26r]). Taking excessive liberty, perhaps justified by his age (he was the Duchess's senior by 13 years), he calls her almost disrespectfully "figliola bella" ('my dear girl') (27r), and orders her not to speak.

The treatment of women in general in *Il libro del cortegiano* has been the subject of many a study in recent times (see Battisti, Finucci and Zancan). It is interesting to note, first of all, that during the initial stages of its drafting the positions taken are more extreme. Only at a later date does Castiglione become more moderate.

Among the early manuscript fragments in Mantua there is a separate group of folios (76r-79v), transcribed by Ghinassi in his article, that constitutes a brief tract in defence of women designed to counter the strong misogynistic tradition also present in the text. Many disparaging comments about women were eventually removed from the early redactions of the treatise. In the passage dealing with the appeal that women are said to have if their charms are hidden or shown by chance, as by nonchalantly lifting their skirts to show a bit of leg (I, 40), there is an additional comment that was later suppressed. An objector remarks that women show much more — not only their legs but parts higher up too (Mantua MS, 11v). Not simply immodest, the female sex is also characterized as being brainless and mad, since women are inclined to commit "tutte le pazzie che se possono imaginare" (Mantua MS, 12v). In summing up the particularly heated discussion about women that is recorded in the early versions, the misogynist Ottaviano tells his opponent that there are a thousand more things that could be said about women to slander them. In fact scorn is heaped not only on women themselves but also on the discussion about them. Even

Camillo Paleotto, the speaker who originally defends women, declares that the whole discussion has been an unwarranted digression (Mantua MS, 103r) — a comment that is softened considerably in the definitive text, where the interlocutor is concerned about not mixing the two topics, that on women with that on courtiers (III, 3: 263).

In addition to the less than gentle treatment meted out to the highly placed women of the court it is interesting to note that the general passivity of the female characters and their conspicuous silence in Castiglione's treatise are even more pronounced in the early drafts where the women are told outright not to speak ("le donne questa sera non hanno da parlare" [Vatican MS 8204, 29v]). In the definitive edition instead (I, 9) the women are exempted from making the intellectual effort of suggesting topics, as though a privilege were being granted them, and the injunctions to be silent are delivered in a much gentler manner.

The weakness of the female characters is further heightened by the fact that any original display of power on their part is eventually mitigated. When the Regina Emilia utters a threat to those who refuse to stop discussing language, the gerund "ridendo" is inserted by Castiglione in an interlinear gloss to tone down the threat (Vatican MS 8205, 50r). This is a word that he adds many a time throughout the treatise for purposes of attenuation, increasing it from 17 times in the first complete draft (Vatican MS 8204) to 66 times in the vulgate. He also suppresses several important retorts favourable to the women's position during the debate on the procedures to be followed. What will the punishment for the loser be? Ottaviano asks. When Emilia replies that the whole group will decide, he objects that women are too partial to their own cause. Emilia's rebuttal that the same could be adduced of men (Vatican MS 8205, 183v) is immediately cancelled in the manuscript by the author and it does not find its way into the later redactions. The author also deleted another comment, this time one by Camillo, the staunch supporter of the female cause, on how different the examples of virtue cited would be if women wrote about themselves as

men do about their own sex (265v). Much less polemically in the definitive edition we merely find the mild statement that men have been far from lavish in their praise of women (III, 13: 276).

As modern readers have noted, many of the *exempla* narrated by the male interlocutors in Book III of the treatise, portray women as the heroic victims of sexual harassment and rape. Most of these incidents date from ancient history but, in the case of the peasant girl Giulia of the nearby town Gazuolo, the time frame is much closer. What Castiglione eventually removed completely from his treatise, though, was a reference to rape that was even more immediate. This is found in a section of an early draft (Vatican MS 8204, 30r) among the topics suggested by the courtiers for discussion. In the manuscript this is a much belaboured passage which evidently gave the author considerable difficulty. Here the speaker voices his own personal dilemma as to which is worse, for him to see his beloved raped, or for his lady to be forced to submit to someone she hates. But the queen presiding over the conversation remarks that, in order to express an opinion on this question, one would have to have experienced both situations, clearly an impossibility, and so she moves on to the next suggestion.

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The sample revisions just reviewed raise the question: Why did Castiglione alter his text? On the question of women, a subject on which he exhibits an ever increasing sense of propriety, Claudio Scarpati (520) has conjectured that Castiglione's happy marriage to Ippolita Torelli in 1516 caused him to soften his stand. Or was the influence of Neoplatonic thought a factor? On the topics pertaining to humour and politics one could cite such factors as external pressures emanating from the papal Curia, for example, or the advice of his readers, or a growing personal sense of the need for caution as he became more aware of the pitfalls enountered in the field of courtiership and diplomacy. For any or all of these reasons he became

increasingly under the yoke of political correctness. And as he revised his text, adapting it to his own altered status and to changing circumstances, he produced a document that reflects an age in transition and the general effects of circumstance and time. The spatially and temporally dominated notion of discretion that he recommends repeatedly for the perfect courtier was an art that he knew well himself and it determined the development of his text. Castiglione acknowledges the importance of time in many ways. The modifications that he brings to his text are additional proof of his conviction that adaptation to space and time is a necessary part of life.

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